



Published on *Royal Entomological Society* (<http://www.royensoc.co.uk>)

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Grasshoppers and Crickets (Orthoptera)

There are eleven species of grasshoppers in the UK. Most grasshoppers have a series of pegs on their hind legs, which they draw across toughened veins in the forewing. This produces the classic stridulatory call of warm summer days. Grasshoppers are herbivores, although they will also eat insect cadavers and even grasshopper faeces. Crickets are similar to grasshoppers, but tend to have longer antennae. Several large crickets are often found in gardens, such as the dark (*Pholidoptera griseoptera*) and the oak bush crickets (*Meconema thalassinum*). The only cricket found inside our homes is the house cricket, *Acheta domesticus*. This species was accidentally introduced from North America in the 17th century, and may be one of our earliest insect invaders from the New World. The house cricket cannot survive the British winter outdoors, although they are sometimes found in rotting rubbish and compost, where heat generated by fermentation provides suitable conditions for their survival.

Grasshopper

Common field grasshopper *Chorthippus brunneus*

Fact File

The very rare Mole Cricket (*Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*) has powerful forelegs which are used to dig tunnels.

The wartbiter cricket (*Decticus verrucivorus*) is the subject of an intense conservation programme in the UK. Some of the best places to see wartbiters are nature reserves on the South Downs, where sunny hillsides with short sward provide suitable habitat.

The locust, *Schistocerca gregaria*, is one of the world's most important agricultural pests. Locusts infected with fungal pathogens choose to sit in the noon sunshine, which heats them beyond their normal body temperature. The heat kills the fungus before the locust is seriously harmed, allowing it to recover.

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Source URL: http://www.royensoc.co.uk/insect_info/what/grasshoppers_and_crickets.htm